Kindergarten preparedness! What does that mean to you as a parent? What does it mean to your child’s teacher? As children and families prepare to enter the world of education there are many pieces that must fit together to make the school experience positive and purposeful. As a parent of four children I can attest to the fact that everything I needed to know about my child’s education wasn’t in any of the books I was reading.

Teaching your child the alphabet, numbers, colors, and shapes is a great way to get them ready for kindergarten, but have you thought about some of the other things needed to be successful in a classroom setting? Can your child sit through a story and listen without interrupting? Does your child know how to take turns? When you child gets upset, what do they do? Have you had play groups with your child so they understand basic social etiquette for their age group? Do you have a routine for bed time and are they getting enough sleep each night? The list could go on and on.

I taught in a Kindergarten classroom for five years and can tell you that the things you do at home matter! Working to set up routines, social interactions, learning games, and simply communicating with your child are just a few things you can do to help your child be prepared for kindergarten.

Over the last decade teaching Kindergarten has changed. Oregon has gone from half day settings to full days. The standards and demands of a kindergarten student are higher than ever. Reading at the end of the kindergarten year is a requirement. Addition facts through 5 is a requirement. Writing sentences with a capital letter and end mark is a requirement.

Teachers are very capable of meeting these requirements with students if students are ready to learn. Often the first month or two or even three is spent on teaching students how to be at school. Students are learning how to sit and listen, how to produce work, communicate, play, and how to be in a classroom with twenty some other students. Days are long and at times the academics are rigorous.

At Stanfield Elementary we are using a self-regulation program called Conscious Discipline to help teachers and students be ready to learn each day. One of the main focuses of Conscious Discipline is to create a school family where students feel safe to learn. Parents and students can both struggle with the goodbye that happens on the first day of school. Conscious Discipline sets up structures for parents, teachers, and students to nurture through the transition. Teachers set up morning greetings, goodbye routines, we missed you routines, and wish well routines. Through these structures students and parents learn to transition to school in a safe, positive way.

Conscious Discipline also helps teachers set structures that teach students how to calm themselves when they are upset, things don’t go their way, or how to bring the class back together after a tough, long academic lesson. Students are taught four different ways to breathe, calm, and relax. The S.T.A.R is the most common, students are taught to Smile – Take a deep
breath – And Relax. There is a lot of research behind breathing as a way to calm and reduces stress.

Preparing students to enter kindergarten is hard work. It is not one or two things, but building a foundation of academic, social, and emotional skills. The more tools a student has on their tool belt the better prepared they are for success.

I encourage you to start small, read at home or communicate about the routines you have in place for your child. Reach out to your local Library for opportunities they may have for your child to participate in social activities with other children their age. Many schools also have pre-kindergarten nights or parent sessions for you to learn more about the school your child will be attending. Parents as partners with the school can make wonderful things happen.

Lacey Sharp is the Principal at Stanfield Elementary School, a partner with the Blue Mountain Early Learning Hub, which works to bridge early childhood resources and prepare children for kindergarten. For more information visit www.bluemountainearlylearninghub.org.